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AUTHOR Watson, Rollin J.
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ABSTRACT

The dichotomy perceived in American life between the "man of fact" and the "man of idea" is mirrored in the rift between a college's administration and its faculty. This rift has resulted, on the community college level, in a lack of faculty involvement in planning for continuing education and community service programs. Financial and political pressures reduce such planning to the fulfillment of full-time equivalent student quotas and the preparation of reports for bureaucratic agencies. The involvement of academic as well as administrative personnel is essential if a college is to maintain a balance of practicality and humanism in its mission of community service. This can be achieved through the development of channels of communication between the faculty and the continuing education office, the designation of a faculty member to monitor each course, and the protection of course and program integrity. The practicality/humanism balance is further protected by periodical assessment of the college's commitment to a concept of community service which stresses (1) people before statistics, (2) the utilization of the interdisciplinary nature of this concept to create a humanistic force in the community, and (3) the maintenance of standards of excellence in humanities curricula despite egalitarian, open door policies. (JP)

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SHAPING HISTORY OR FALLING INTO IT?

REFLECTIONS ON THE FACULTY'S ROLE IN CONTINUING EDUCATION--COMMUNITY SERVICES

by

Rollin J. Watson

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Shaping History or Falling Into It?
Reflections on the Faculty's Role in Continuing Education-Community Services

Like most academic intellectuals, Robert Penn Warren was concerned in his time with the dichotomy he perceived in American life between the "man of fact" and the "man of idea" which he epitomized in his characters Willie Stark and Jack Burden in his novel of 1946, All the King's Men. The same antithesis between action and thought in academic life has been the subject of much discussion, notably in works like Veblen's The Higher Learning in America, Richard Hofstadter's Anti Intellectualism in American Life, and Theodore Roszak's The Dissenting Academy. The disdain for the administrator by the faculty member is a venerable tradition in itself, one that is old and passionate, full in times of retrenchment of rancor, and in better times, characterized at least by affectionate sarcasm. The contempt for the administrator by the faculty member has often had a valid basis in reality, no doubt, because there is a tendency for the administrative mentality, with its emphasis upon action, to become hostile to the contemplative commitment of instructors. It need not be noted that there exists also a reciprocal scorn for scholars by those who are preoccupied with day to day processes, a condition that develops when the managerial function overshadows the administrator's affirmation of the primacy of education in his own role as manager. The fields of continuing education and community services, which have grown up almost tangentially, often independently of the central academic programs in colleges, are one of the areas most prone to have a lack of integration of the faculty in program planning and development. In many institutions, continuing education is a purely

administrative exercise. This situation does not bode well for the future.

The late Trappist monk Thomas Merton observed in his Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander that in spite of our idealism, or perhaps because of our blind devotion to ideals at the expense of realities, America's treatment of others had upon occasion been permeated by the country's baser motives, and the Great Democracy had therefore "fallen into history" like everybody else. A similar corruption of ideals by encroaching realities may have befallen continuing education and community services in colleges over recent years. Does our lofty ideal of community services and our high standards for continuing education courses still evoke the same inspired humanism that it once did? At times it seems that our rhetorical commitment to continuing education and community services has grown more stentorian because it serves to camouflage the fact that we are moving farther from the integration of college faculties in these activities, and this fact indeed threatens the very character of continuing education and community services. In many public institutions, community services offices have had to give in to pressures to homogenize their programs, to bring them into line with the more important purposes of raising money for the colleges and meeting the newly imposed regulations of funding agencies. How well the quality of continuing education and community services is maintained seems to depend at least partially on how well it is integrated with the academic community as a whole. It can no longer afford to stand as an autonomous enterprise.

Certainly one of the greatest pressures facing continuing education and community services is financial. The old time altruism and humanism of community services efforts no longer fare well in the market place;

now colleges rely heavily upon the income produced by community service projects, so professionals have been forced to become less concerned with "low priority" funding items like "creative arts centers," informal (recreational) courses, training for avocations or life enrichment, and community improvement activities. State and county legislators have preferred programs which show tangible results, and this pressure in turn helps to detract from the uniqueness of our institutions, making them too much like continuing education mills whose only purpose is to generate sufficient income to keep the institutions alive.

It is interesting to look at what has happened to continuing education and community services in the community college. At its inception, ironically, the comprehensive community college was, on the one hand, because of its intensely pragmatic orientation, one of the most secular indigenous institutions ever established in the United States, while on the other it was almost religiously missionary in its drive to fulfill its "mission" -- and its mission was embodied in the term "community service." A balance of practicality and humanism made the community college a paradigmatic American institution. In many catalogues, even today, the commitment to community services has a place equal to or greater than that assigned to transfer and career programs. From the beginning, the kind of institutional humanism built into the community college was preserved in the office of community services, with the director serving as a type of priest, a reminder of the institution's sacred mission of service. The best early directors became consultants to their communities, serving individual and collective needs by developing programs which would help make up for vocational, avocational, cultural, and even social, educational deficiencies. This scheme held up well during

the "brick and mortar" era of the colleges, but in the 1970's, in the wake of Watergate, increasing political and economic controls and the growth of bureaucracy at the funding level have tended to erode the original ideal, corrupt the priest, and place the whole endeavor in a crisis of values.

In many places, continuing education endeavors are judged solely by how many full-time equivalent students they serve. The "FTE fever" strikes institutions whose funding formula is based upon the number of FTE's they produce. As traditional enrollment sources dwindle, there is greater competition between segments of the higher education system. Continuing education administrators are so busy copying the programs of other institutions that they virtually forget about involving their own faculties in their programs.

In addition, whether we like it or not, community services has become politicized. The situation in Maryland seems to epitomize what is happening on a larger scale. A "clean up" campaign by some state legislators, brought about by what one critic has called "the Maryland syndrome" of corruption, extending to disclosures that one institution had allegedly defrauded the income reporting system, has placed many valuable community centered programs in a tenuous position. The state's political and economic concerns are reflected in the pressing exigencies of the continuing education professionals, who feel obligated to make themselves more accountable, and who, in doing so, are growing increasingly reluctant about programs which do not produce income, which are not "academic," and which are not in some way vocationally oriented. The fulfillment of individual and community needs could gradually take a place behind income production and its bureaucratic mechanisms as the

true function of community services offices, so that as much staff time is spent in the procedures for reporting as in the development of programs.

Tighter control of itself does not necessitate lower quality programs or less diversity in them -- and the new controls may even have a tendency to improve quality -- but we must guard against the narrowing of purpose that often follows the imposition of bureaucratic procedures. One immediate danger is that we will lose our ability to respond rapidly, especially when each new idea must go through an elaborate approval process before it may be implemented.

The solution to this dilemma seems to be in the achievement of a full integration of continuing education-community services with the academic programs of a college. A staff of professionals can set goals for themselves which protect the true community oriented activities by ensuring that a certain proportion of their efforts go to income producing activities. In doing so, they must be careful to achieve a balance of these two activities; it is here that the role of the faculty is crucial. With the integrity of continuing education courses being more seriously questioned than ever before, steps must be taken to integrate the full-time faculty into continuing education-community services. Three facets are necessary if this integration is to be achieved. First, channels of communication between the continuing education office and the faculty must be opened. The faculty as a whole should be given a periodic update of the functions of the office. There should be a faculty continuing education advisory committee composed of divisional representatives. The divisions should be involved in the initiation and development of courses, and appropriate administrative mechanisms to ensure this can

easily be set up. Secondly, in order to guarantee faculty involvement in planning and evaluation, the administrative procedures should include the designation of a faculty member to monitor each course. Identification of faculty members who have a special interest is also helpful, and the involvement of administrators on faculty committees such as the Academic Council is essential. The third element, course and program integrity, is more likely to follow if the above steps are taken. It certainly doesn't hurt either if administrators are involved in teaching and in departmental activities in their disciplines.

Progress toward the goal of balance should be assessed periodically. This evaluation should examine philosophical commitments such as the idea of "service," the interdisciplinary nature of continuing education-community services, and the standards of excellence by which they are guided. Theodore Roszak, in a discussion of the "twin ideals" of service and scholarship which have guided the American university, points out that the ideal of "service" often degenerated into the reality of the "service station."[1] Being a service station is quite a different thing than being a full service institution with well defined goals. We can be seduced by market pressures into dropping a broad commitment to the community in favor of one that "fills the gap" and generates enough FTE's to meet more immediate expectations. When we reexamine the concept of service, those of us who have always believed that service is the heart of the community college should reaffirm our commitment to that belief; we must be more accountable than we once were, but that does not mean that we should forsake people for statistics. We should not allow sordid fiscal realities to obfuscate in our minds the fact that community service makes

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[1]Theodore Roszak, "On Academic Delinquency," The Dissenting Academy (New York, 1967), p. 7.

the difference between the comprehensive community college and the continuing education factory.

One of the most beneficial aspects of community services offices has been their interdisciplinary nature, for typically they have integrated all of the resources of the colleges in serving their communities. Roszak asserts that the erosion of "service and scholarship" in the university came about because of the insistence on "evaluating the academic, not as a whole personality, but rather as the receptacle of specialized and seemingly detachable talents."[2] Similarly, there may be an increasing departmentalization of community services operations, primarily because of outside pressures, at the same time as there is a tendency to serve certain specific needs of the community and ignore others. The mission of community services should be holistic, because it attempts to serve the whole spectrum of needs in the community. This is not to say that it cannot coordinate responses through other agencies or avoid programs which would be duplications. Community services is one of the few places in a college where scholarship can be fully integrated with service. The community services offices should be a humanizing force in the community, and in the college.

It seems imperative, if community services is to survive as an ideal, that it go hand in hand with agreed upon standards of excellence. There are several reasons why we need standards, not the least of which is a pervasive fear of "elitist notions." Programs in the humanities and fine arts, especially, have been victimized by our desire to be thoroughly democratic institutions serving the majority at the expense of the minority: it is safer, for instance, to give the community "bread and

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[2] Ibid.

butter" courses than it is to try to entice them to learn how to enjoy a play, examine their local history, provide preparatory training in the arts, or sing in a community chorus. Because community colleges are intensely egalitarian institutions, having their very roots in the drive for equal opportunity, anything that smacks of privilege has been anathema, and besides, high-toned cultural programs are regarded by some as being beyond the scope of the community college mission. We can be thoroughly democratic, "open door," and still present programs and services of the highest quality. We cannot fulfill our mission in society if we merely strive for the commonplace. We should neglect neither the practical needs nor the humanitarian ones, but we should not exalt one to the exclusion of the other. Again, we must strive to achieve a balance of practical and cultural offerings.

Certain model programs can be held out as examples of our commitment to excellence, but this does not mean that institutional showboating should be the major function of community services. Programs which generate extraordinary publicity, helping to enhance the reputation of the community college, will come, if the standards we hold for ourselves are high. The involvement of the faculty is the only factor that can guarantee this high level of integrity.

But are standards of excellence possible in institutions whose function is so diverse, ambitious, and in these times even ambiguous? Standards of excellence in the community college must derive from the community itself, from the profession, and from the faculties of the individual colleges. We can begin to lessen the ambiguity of our effort by setting clearly defined goals for ourselves and by resisting the tendency to give in to the pressures which would weaken us. If retaining

our uniqueness as community colleges is at stake, and it seems to be, then we should have the courage to reiterate to our funding agencies that this is our primary purpose. The faculty will support us if they fully understand and willingly involve themselves in our mission. We should present well devised programs, and be fiscally responsible, but our programs should reflect our commitment and that of the faculty. The character of continuing education and community services can shape the future history of the community colleges.

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